



## KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

### Report on King County Concurrency Modeling Review July 2006

The state Growth Management Act requires local jurisdictions to strike a balance among growth, traffic congestion, and the availability of funding to provide infrastructure needed to support new development. It requires that adequate transportation facilities be in place concurrent with new development. If sufficient facilities are not in place, proposed developments must be amended or denied. This requirement is known as "concurrency." King County's roads concurrency program attempts to assess whether sufficient infrastructure is in place to support proposed new developments. This study assessed the impacts of changes made by the council to King County's road concurrency program in 2004, and also assessed whether the Road Services Division follows standard industry practices for traffic modeling for the roads concurrency program. The study was conducted by Mirai Transportation Planning and Engineering, under a contract with the King County Auditor's Office.

The study found that the impacts of the council's 2004 policy changes would allow for additional development countywide, but less development in some areas, particularly in the rural area of King County. Also, at the same time that the council adopted changes to concurrency program policy, the Road Services Division changed certain traffic modeling practices, which had a larger impact than the council's changes to concurrency policy. The modeling practice changes, which were not adequately documented or explained to the council, would also allow more development because the amount of traffic congestion measured by the Road Services Division was significantly reduced. The study questions whether stricter level of service standards in the rural area may result in an unintended consequence of promoting additional road improvements in the rural area because many facilities in the rural area are not meeting the strict rural standard.

The study also found that the concurrency program is overly complex, uses questionable traffic modeling practices, and quality control over the program is insufficient. Because of these concerns, the report questions whether King County's roads concurrency program is achieving the balance among growth, traffic congestion, and funding that is envisioned by the Growth Management Act. The report includes 11 recommendations for improving modeling practices, reducing complexity, and improving quality control.

#### **Impact of Council's 2004 Policy Changes**

In 2004, the council adopted policy changes that lowered the level of service (accepted more traffic congestion before denying development) in the urban area, and changed one of the two methods for measuring traffic congestion. These changes, in general, will allow for more development in the urban area, but less development in the rural area. However, the study found that changes to modeling practices by the Road Services Division, which were not adequately documented or explained to the council, had a greater impact than the council's changes to policy. The modeling changes allow for more development countywide, because the amount of congestion measured in the model was significantly reduced.

#### **Problems with Modeling Practices**

The study found several problems with traffic modeling practices used for the concurrency program including excessive complexity, use of questionable modeling practices, and lack of quality control. For example, the Road Services Division was not able to recreate the changes to modeling practices that led to a significant reduction in the amount of traffic congestion measured in the concurrency model.

#### **Policy Issues Raised**

The very high level of service standard in the rural area may create an unintended consequence of promoting road improvements in the rural area because the standard is not being met in many areas. Alternatively, not meeting the standard could cause development that otherwise meets zoning requirements to be denied, even though little traffic congestion may actually exist.

#### **Recommendations**

The report makes 11 recommendations that are intended to improve modeling practices, reducing the complexity of the program, and improving quality control. Also, recommendations suggest the county give consideration to the potential unintended consequences of some concurrency policies.

#### **Executive Response**

The executive concurred with 5 of the 11 recommendations, partially concurred with 3 recommendations, and did not concur with 3 recommendations.